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A CLASSIFICATION OF THE GENERAL COLLEGE STUDENT PERSONNEL OFFICE CASE LOAD.

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THIS STUDY PRESENTS A PILOT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR PERSONNEL OFFICE CASES, EASILY USED BY THE COUNSELORS AND SHOWING A BREAKDOWN OF SUCH ELEMENTS AS INTERVIEW CONTENT AND THE STUDENTS' REASONS FOR SEEKING COUNSELING. WORK DONE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI WAS USED AS AN OUTLINE FOR THE FINAL 2-DIMENSIONAL SYSTEM. DIMENSION I CLASSIFIES THE CONTENT OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS, COVERING THE TOPICS THAT GENERAL COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE LIKELY TO BRING UP IN AN INTERVIEW. AN APPENDIX SHOWS THESE CATEGORIES ON A CODE SHEET. DIMENSION II GIVES FOUR CLASSES OF CAUSAL FACTORS--(1) A STUDENTS' NEED FOR PARTICULAR INFORMATION, (2) HIS NEED TO KNOW THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS ITEMS OF INFORMATION, (3) HIS PERSONAL PROBLEM(S) OR (4) AN INTERPERSONAL PROBLEM OR CONFLICT. OTHER DATA COLLECTED ON HE CODE SHEET WERE (1) TIME SPENT IN EACH INTERVIEW, (2) REFERRAL SOURCE, (3) TYPE OF INTERVIEW (INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, OR DUAL), (4) NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS WITH EACH STUDENT, AND (5) THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CONTENT OF EACH INTERVIEW. ALTHOUGH THIS PILOT STUDY COVERED ONLY THE SPRING QUARTER 1966, THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT THE DATA COLLECTED WOULD VARY GREATLY FROM QUARTER TO QUARTER. A FOLLOWUP STUDY IS SUGGESTED ON THE STUDENT IMAGE OF THE STUDENT PERSONNEL OFFICE, HOW HE LEARNS OF ITS SERVICES, WHAT HE THINKS ITS FUNCTIONS ARE, AND HOW WELL HE THINKS THEY ARE PERFORMED. THIS DOCUMENT IS VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1 OF "THE GENERAL COLLEGE STUDIES, " 1965-66. (HH)

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A CLASSIFICATION OF THE GENERAL COLLEGE STUDENT PERSONNEL OFFICE CASE LOAD

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An integral part of an innovating and experimenting college, the General College Student Personnel Division has for many years carried on a continuing series of research projects involving many phases of its activities. A report of one of these studies (number 34 in the division's present series) makes up this issue of The General College Studies.

The 65-66 academic year, when Dr. Scheller and his colleagues began this study, was a time of ferment in the General College. New admissions policies were being applied. Large numbers of students were taking advantages of counseling services. The size of the division staff was increased to cope with the demand, and the training of graduate students who were prospective counselors, under the aegis of the General College Internship Program, took on new urgency.

As a part of its efforts to keep abreast of student needs, the staff of the division sought a systematic means of classifying its counseling activities. Dr. Scheller points out in his report that no ready-made classification was immediately available, and that therefore a first step was to construct such a system.

The classification scheme finally devised, and used successfully in the General College, is included here as Appendix A. Readers of this report may find it useful as a model when planning counseling analysis projects for their own colleges. Dr. Scheller now is vice-president of Saint Mary's Junior College in Minneapolis.

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A CLASSIFICATION OF THE GENERAL COLLEGE STUDENT PERSONNEL OFFICE CASE LOAD

The use of classification systems in counseling centers has been in vogue for many years. Various diagnostic and classification categories have been proposed, used, and reported in the literature (2,3,4). The Student Personnel Division of the General College, previous to Spring Quarter, 1966, had not attempted any analysis of its counseling case load. However, with increased student contact, more involvement in the training of counselors, and a larger resident staff, members of the General College Student Personnel Office felt that specific information about the office's case load would be enlightening and useful.

The original intent of this study, therefore, was to devise a pilot classification system that would (1) be easily used by the counselors involved and that would (2) give a fairly specific break down of several elements, such as interview content and factors causing students to seek counseling.

After looking at several possible systematic approaches, it appeared that the work done at the University of Missouri (1) offered the best general framework for our purposes. A preliminary system that evolved from this framework was modified and refined in counseling staff seminars. Basically, the system proposed was a two-dimensional one: Dimension I classified the content of individual interviews. The categories used were structured to cover all topics that General College students were likely to bring up in an interview. The categories of Dimension I, named and coded, are given in Appendix A. Dimension II represented "causal factors," and required the counselor to make a judgment about the basic cause of the problem being

presented. Four categories of "causal factors" (S_1, S_2, and O_1, O_2) were available and are described briefly below.

S_1 and S_2 (S=Self): The S_1 category was assigned by the counselor when it appeared that the primary activity of the interview was the transmitting of information (e.g., registration procedures, test interpretation, occupational information) that the client seemed to lack or that he needed in order to make a decision. S_2 was used when it appeared, not that the student lacked information to make choices, but rather that he had a conflict regarding the weight to be placed on the information about choices, such as, for instance, whether to continue in school or to join the service.

O_1 and O_2 (O=Other): O_1 was designed to describe causal factors associated with some problems of an interpersonal nature. Discussions of topics such as, "I never have a date," would probably be coded with O_1. O_2 codes were used primarily with problems of interpersonal conflict: e.g., student-parent clashes.

Several other data were collected on the code sheet:

(1) Time spent in each interview

(2) Referral source: i.e., How did the student happen to get to the Student Personnel Office?

(3) Type of interview: individual, group, or "dual counseling"; i.e., two counselors working with one client

(4) Number of interviews held with each student

(5) Relevance: the "primary" and "secondary" content focus of each interview

PURPOSE:

The study was an attempt to acquire information about the client population of the Student Personnel Office of the General College through the use of the classification system.

Specifically, it attempted to answer questions about

(1) Content of interviews.

(2) Causal factors associated with the "problem."

(3) Time spent in interviewing.

(4) Referral sources.

(5) Differences in problems brought in by males and females.

(6) Counselor differences over some of the dimensions involved.

PROCEDURE:

After the staff had made decisions about the dimensions of the data to be collected, a coded tally sheet was devised to record the results of each interview. (See Appendix A.)

Although it was considered possible that the kinds of clients and/or the problems varied from quarter to quarter, there was no evidence, subjective, or objective, to support such a notion with respect to the General College's Student Personnel Office. The staff, therefore, decided on the basis of convenience and immediacy to conduct the pilot study throughout Spring Quarter, 1966 (March 28-June 11).

Data sheets were completed by individual counselors following each interview with a student. The sheets were filled in for scheduled and non-scheduled appointments, that is, for all personnel office student contacts. Scheduled appointments for which the students did not appear were recorded as "no shows." The data sheets were held in each counselor's office until the end of the period under study.

Nine counselors, three female and six male, ranging in appointment time from one quarter to full-time, all with prior experience in counseling and student personnel work, were involved in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

One point must be clarified before presenting the findings. Although staff discussions were held in an attempt to get agreement about the meaning and use of the various categories and codes used in this project, the study does not include either intra- or inter-counselor reliability figures. Thus, we can say only that the results are accurate tabulations of how counselors assigned the codes, not that the results are in agreement with the "facts." Both "content areas" and "causal factors" have elements of ambiguity, allowing factors such as counselor bias and/or differences in perspective to enter in. The results of the study must be interpreted with this causion in mind.

Reference to Appendix A, the coded tally sheet, will facilitate reading the following tables.

Table I, below, presents the concept of "primary and secondary focus." Some interviews with students were wide ranging in content: the category of "secondary focus" was added to give the counselor flexibility and to allow him the opportunity to give a detailed description of the interview content. No attempt was made to make "primary and secondary" objective in terms of total time spent on a topic. The coding of secondary focus was arbitrary: i.e., to be used when a "significant" amount of interview time was spent on a topic other than the primary one.

In addition to a primary focus designated for every interview, counselors elected to use a secondary focus description in about one-third of the cases recorded. Use of the secondary focus was uniformly scattered throughout the content area range in fairly direct proportion to the scatter of the primary focus.

TABLE I

Number and Percent of Primary and Secondary Interview Focus in Each Content Area.

Content Area	Primary Focus of Interview		Secondary Focus of Interview	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A_1	30	2.4	0	
A_2	6	0.5	0	
A_3	2	0.2	7	1.7
A_4	9	0.7	2	.5
B_1	192	15.4	44	10.9
B_2	102	8.2	13	3.2
C_1	163	13.1	68	16.9
C_2	404	32.4	140	34.8
C_3	17	1.4	10	2.5
D	284	22.8	98	24.4
E	38	3.0	20	5.0
Total	1247	100.1	402	99.9

The data from Table I were recombined into two categories: C_1, C_2, and C_3, versus All Others. Categories C_1, C_2, and C_3 are grouped together since they are the content areas that are most likely to involve "counseling" in the formal sense of the word, while the remainder of the categories reflect activities of counselors in their roles of advisors, administrators, or college representatives. The majority of the contacts outside the C categories are also "forced contacts," since students must see a counselor in order, for instance, to get a registration card or to have a cancel-out-of

school slip signed.

TABLE II

Percent of Primary and Secondary
Focus Over Two Broad Content Areas

Content Area	Primary Focus	Secondary Focus
C_1, C_2, C_3	46.8	54.2
All Others	53.2	45.8
Total	100.0	100.0

Over half of the student personnel staff's interviews focussed on activities other than formal counseling. Since no figures for previous quarters or years are available, there is no evidence to indicate that this finding for Spring, 1966, is unique. Whether it should be of concern at all is a value judgment related to the function and philosophy of the Student Personnel Office in the General College. The implications of this finding, however, are manifold. For example, in order for the counselor to be effective with all students in the General College setting, he must have adequate knowledge about the many complex aspects of college and university regulations and procedures. This requirement has, in turn, some implication for the training of new counselors in the college.

In addition to recording the primary focus of each interview, counselors kept a record of the length of each interview in quarter hours. Table III, below, gives the interview time for each of the content areas.

TABLE III

Interview Time Spent (in quarter hours)
in Each of the Content Areas

Content Area	Interview Time (in quarter hours) 1	2	3	4	Not Given	Total	Percent
A_1	1	16	5	8		30	2.4
A_2	1	1	4			6	0.5
A_3	1	1				2	0.2
A_4	4	3	1	1		9	0.7
B_1	59	107	19	2	5	192	15.4
B_2	84	14	1		3	102	8.2
C_1	16	40	38	67	2	163	13.1
C_2	30	247	69	55	3	404	32.4
C_3	2	9	3	3		17	1.4
D	107	152	19	1	5	284	22.8
E	12	19	3	4		38	3.0
Total	317	609	162	141	18	1247	100.1

Taking into account, not only the number of interviews with primary focus in a particular content area, but also the length of time devoted to each interview leads to the conclusion that, although less than one-half of the interviews involved formal counseling, over half of the total time available was devoted to vocational-educational or personal counseling. This finding, of course, makes sense since some of the functions that counselors perform are relatively simple administrative tasks involving, for example, form signing. One consideration that emerges from this finding is the desirability of "intake" interviews which might have the effect of cutting down on scheduled but unused interview time. At present, all scheduled interviews are

initially one-half hour in length.

One factor in Table III that seems somewhat surprising is the relatively small amount of interview time given to discussions of C_3, study skills. Since the academic records of General College students reflect a deficiency in study skills, one would expect that something more than a dozen half-hours would be spent in discussing this subject during a full academic quarter.

It cannot be concluded from the discussion above that no "counseling" takes place when the content area is coded as primarily administrative in nature. Counselors generally use registration time to talk, at least in a general way, about such matters as long range goals, study habits, and other such matters. It is also a fact that more formal counseling contacts are arranged during some of the "forced contact" interviews. During the spring quarter, for instance, sixty cases were recorded in which a "forced contact" was followed by one or more voluntary interviews, which were then coded C_1, C_2, and C_3.

It still remains true, however, that the vast majority of contacts are one-time events, at least over the relatively short period of time that records were kept. A total of 933 clients were seen 1247 times during the quarter. Although the mean number of interviews is low, some students were seen as often as ten times; also, at least 14% of the clients involved in the spring quarter study had been seen by a counselor earlier in the academic year; that is, they represent continuing contacts.

Inferences about why students seek counseling can be made on the basis of Table IV.

TABLE IV

Distribution of Causal Factors
Over Primary Content Categories

Content Area	S_1	S_2	O_1	O_2	Not Coded	Total
A_1	22				8	30
A_2	4				2	6
A_3					2	2
A_4	5	2			2	9
B_1	129	6	1		56	192
B_2	24	7	1		70	102
C_1	82	42	8	24	7	163
C_2	338	39	2		25	404
C_3	16				1	17
D	159	11	2	2	110	284
E	22	1	1		14	38
Total	801	108	15	26	297	1247

The great bulk of the clients are seen by counselors to be "lacking information," the S_1 category. (How great a part "rater bias" plays on these results is unknown.) Normally, one would not expect counselors to designate an interpersonal causal factor outside of the "personal" area on the tally sheet. Since the majority of the contacts were one-time interviews, information-seeking seems to be the student's prime motivation for seeing a counselor.

Table V presents the findings on sources of referral.

TABLE V

Number and Percent of Referral Sources

	Referral Source	Number	Percent
1	Administrative (e.g., cancel out, adult special)	165	17.7
2	Response to letter from the Student Personnel Office	30	3.2
3	Advisor, teacher, counselor (Academic)	113	12.1
4	Advisee, continued contact, saw before	125	13.4
5	People other than "academic" (e.g., Admissions and Records, friend, parent, doctor, minister)	41	4.4
6	Read about (e.g., bulletin board, daily notice)	13	1.4
7	Self	388	41.6
8	Not coded	58	6.2
	Totals	933	100.0

As the results stand, it is regrettable that the "self" category was not further specified. It would have been both interesting and informative to have more detailed information about how the student learns of the services available in the Student Personnel Office. There is some evidence that counselors had some difficulty in remembering to ask about this category of information; it may be that "self" became the catch-all code for those who forgot to ask specifically. A follow-up project might include some research on the student "image" of the Student Personnel Office. Such a study should elicit information about what the students think its functions are; it should also evoke some student evaluative data.

The male-female distributions were compared next. While the number of males and females who had counseling appointments was not significantly different from the General College population distribution, there was a significant sex difference ($p. < .01$) in the content area coded. Females tended (proportionately) to bring in more problems coded C_1 personal; males had more content coded D, cancelled out; transferred out; graduated. Although it is not reflected in this report, the number of males who cancel out of school during the quarter is probably proportionally higher than the number of females who cancel.

The picture of the typical General College Student Personnel Office client is fairly clear: He is male, self-referred, has one interview, and generally lacks specific information about a vocational choice. This is not to say, however, that individual counselors viewed their clients similarly. In fact, on examination of tallying differences among the individual counselors; reveals wide diversity in their coding of content areas, causal factors, interview times, and number of interviews per client. A few counselors were heavily involved in personal counseling, and this fact rather naturally resulted in more and longer interviews per client. The nature of the Student Personnel Office and the diversity of problems presented to it permits the individual counselor wide latitude in emphasizing the kinds of counseling he feels would be most helpful to his clients.

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4. Leventhal, A. M., A Pilot Study: Screening Ratings of Counseling Center Clients, Research Report #23-64. Mimeo, U. of Maryland Counseling Center.

Last_____ First_____ Middle_____ Code_____

Interview No.	1	2	3	4	5
Counselor and Date					
No Show					
A-1 Prospective New Student					
A-2 Transfer-In					
A-3 Adult Special					
A-4 Probation, Hold, Drop					
B-1 Program Planning					
B-2 C/A, C/C					
C-1 Personal					
C-2 Vocational-Educational					
C-3 Study Skills					
D C/O, T/O, Graduation					
E Other (Specify)					
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

Referred by:

Content

W = Presenting problem

X = Primary focus

Y = Secondary focus

Causal Factors

S = Self
1. Lack of info. understanding
2. Conflict

O = Other
1. Lack of info. understanding
2. Conflict

Contact

G = Group

D = Dual Counseling

APPENDIX A